

Module 1

My learning plan for this module of Classroom Environment, Student Engagement and Commitment to Learning includes reading textbooks such as How the Brain Learns Mathematics by Sousa and Teach like a Champion by Lemov. I also observed and talked with my mathematics colleagues and utilized my mentor for growth. My goal will be to learn and apply new procedures to decrease transition time and establish firmer routines during class. From my readings and talking to other teachers in the math department, I was able to come up with techniques to improve classroom management and classroom transitions. I implemented classroom rules, a problem of the day in my classroom that was monitored with a timer, and a small supply of frequently forgotten utensils, such as pencils.

This is my first year of teaching and I work at a special education school. I did try to use all the techniques I learned from student teaching and apply them for my first year of teaching. With trying to acclimate to a new school system and students, I had to rework the skills I already had. I've found that adaptation is always an important part of teaching. When this module paper was assigned, I saw this as a chance to utilize new learning. After my readings and talking with staff, I realized the best way to ease transitions was to implement a Problem of the Day.

At the beginning of the year, classroom rules and routines are established and set into place. Because I was new, I was trying to optimize learning time. I wanted to jump straight into learning because the students often walked in late and class did not start on time. Since the environment was not structured around bells to mark the beginning of class time for a particular subject, transition times from the hallway to the start of class were particularly challenging. Learning time was also constantly being interrupted by phone calls during class from the main office. Students were consistently late due to on-campus jobs or taking their medications. Class did not start until around five minutes in, and I wanted to get the most out of my lesson, especially since students at the school usually work at a slower pace. My plan was to take initiative and urge the students to work directly upon entering the classroom by using a Problem of the Day. My expectation was to ensure a smoother transition time and establish positive constructive routines so that students would begin thinking. This would get students thinking as soon as they entered my classroom. Students were advised to take out their notebooks as soon as they entered and work on the problem of the day.

On the first day of school, we went over classroom rules. They were:

- To receive respect, you must show respect. I will respect you, I expect you to respect others and me.
- Be polite to all people. Listen carefully. Do not interrupt the teacher or other students. Do not use inappropriate language. Rudeness and disrespect will not be tolerated.
- Respect the property of others. Put litter in trashcan. Return borrowed items. All classroom books must be placed on the designated shelf before leaving the classroom. Do not write on desks, books, walls, etc.

- Bring all needed materials to class every day (pencil, paper, text, notebooks, and assignments).
- Obey all school wide rules (e.g., dress codes; absentee policy; no food, drink, or gum in the classroom; and no laptops without permission, cell phones, iPods, or mp3 players during class time -- they will be subject to confiscation).
- Exercise self-control at all times. Crude and offensive language will not be tolerated. Keep hands and feet to yourself. No items (e.g. pencils, paper wads, etc.) are to be thrown or tossed inside the classroom. Tone and volume of voice will be controlled at all times.
- ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST!

From day one students had a clear expectations of what I expected in the classroom. But sometimes distractions and change can be hard to follow for students at a special education school. Students often get distracted from school work when they are struggling with their anxiety, depression, or a home situation, etc. This can hinder their learning and the process of starting class on time. None the less Students understood that if they are late to class there will be a consequence.

In reading the classroom technique textbooks, I learned that students retain the most information in the prime time one and prime time two blocks of class and least remember the downtime and practice part of class (Sousa, pg. 204). I wanted to optimize classroom learning during these two sections of class. So by utilizing a Problem of the Day, I am able to optimize the learning in the prime time one block of class. I also end my class with a closure question to wrap up the lesson and ensure the goal of the lesson was learned.

Based off my readings "with repeated exposures, novel experiences become routine, and their cortical processing areas shift from the right hemisphere to the left hemisphere." (Sousa, pg. 136) By making the Problem of the Day a repeated daily exposure, the students in my geometry class got accustomed to routines and this helped them get in the mindset of doing math for eighty minutes. A Problem of the day initiates learning and involved a skill or concept previously learned that tied in with what the lesson concept for that day. The Problem of the Day (POD) reminds students that math is a continuous type of class.

A POD answers the question "What am I supposed to be doing?" and "What are we learning today?" (Lemov, pg. 152) I learned when deciding how to make the problem of the day effective and efficient to consider four criteria. The first is the POD should be able to be done on the students' own, and without any directing from the teacher. The POD should be no longer than a five minute activity or problem. I also learned the POD is best when it involves a written product from the work done as it makes the POD more rigorous and engaging, but allows to hold students more accountable. As Lemov shares in his book the activity should recall/review prior learning or preview the plan for the current day's lesson.

In practice, the Problem of the Day allowed for an easier transition in class. By cutting down the beginning of class transition from five minutes to two minutes essentially I am adding extra instructional time to the school year. Having a Problem of the Day is a transition that is critical to my classroom management. It was the difference between getting through a lesson and running out of time. The smoother, shorter transition to beginning class, allowed me the time at the end to summarize and recap the days' learning. By creating a problem of the day every day in my classroom messy transition time from hallway passing was alleviated and helped cut down disruptions and the likelihood of student to student conflict, thereby promoting a better learning environment for all students. The problem of the day consistently and effectively ensured smoother and speedier transitions. I incorporated the use of a timer, which I set for seven minutes. This helped both me and my students keep the POD to an appropriate portion of the class time. After seven minutes I urged the students to finish their thoughts.

Students at first were reluctant to start the Problem of the Day. They had to be prompted multiple times to take out their notebooks and a writing utensil. Sometimes students would be unprepared for class and because of this I learned to keep extra writing utensils in my desk. Some students in my fourth period would hesitate asking for a pen or pencil, but I have become pretty good at spotting students not writing down the Problem of the Day. So I give students the tools they need to complete the POD. Most students at the school were used to doing a Problem of the Day in their other classes but not in geometry on a daily basis. When I implemented a problem of the day half way through semester two students complained. I quickly stopped that from becoming a daily occurrence by talking with them after class and encouraging them to challenge themselves. These past few weeks I have seen a positive change in the classroom and in my students. Students enter my geometry class room and expect to do a Problem of the Day. Many students now come in the classroom and take out their notebooks without prompting. Students begin working as soon as the Problem of the Day is on the white board.

Students still may have a bad day or two, or come in late to class due to chatting with a friend in the hallway, but students now know my classroom routine and expectations and overall the students were much more settled upon gathering and class began to on time more consistently and smoothly. Students only need one prompt to start the POD versus three or four. Class is no longer starting late after the scheduled time.

Having a problem of the day everyday ensures an easy transition to the start of class and learning. It establishes a firm routine in my classroom. A problem of the day is a great technique for creating a strong classroom culture because it is consistent. Together the implantation of the class rules, the POD, and the timer has decreased transition as well as established firmer routines time in my class.